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MEMORANDUM FOR THE BOARD

SUBJECT: Soviet Atomic Capabilities

REFERENCES: A. NIE-25, 25 April Draft, para. 30
B. Col. Barber's Memorandum, 15 May

1. Inasmuch as I shall not be here for further discussion of the subject, I take this means of commenting on Col. Barber's memorandum.

2. With respect to para. 1. These figures refer only to US capabilities to shoot down Soviet bombers: i.e., to Soviet combat losses. They do not take into account the other factors mentioned in Reference A: bombs reserved, operational losses, gross aiming errors, and malfunctions. Some of these factors may be impossible to estimate. The fact remains, however, that no satisfactory basis exists for translating estimated stockpile into bombs exploded on target.

3. With respect to para. 2. These figures are impressive, but, in the paragraphs own terms, some 433 bombs would be required to justify a Soviet expectation of accomplishing this effect, taking into account only combat losses. An even greater number would be required, taking into account the other factors indicated above. Moreover, these are our calculations; the USSR would probably include a considerable margin for error in its own before deciding to undertake so fateful an action. Thus the Soviet stockpile would probably have to be considerably in excess of 433 before the USSR could feel reasonably assured of a capability to accomplish the effects indicated. Our estimate of Soviet stockpile, however, does not go beyond a much lower number in 1954. That would mean, in effect, that even at that date, the USSR could not expect to accomplish the degree of destruction indicated by these figures. In the end, these figures mean no more than could be said a priori: that eventually the USSR can make enough atomic bombs to knock out the US unless we can meanwhile find means to prevent it.

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MAY 22 1951
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22 May 51 DATE		
TO: AD/NE		
BUILDING	ROOM NO.	
REMARKS: <i>Central files</i>		
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FROM:		
BUILDING		EXTENSION

FORM NO. 36-8
SEP 1946